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## **Martin H. Freeman of Rutland America's First Black College Professor and Pioneering Black Social Activist**

MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE



*Martin Henry Freeman*  
(1826–1889)

## Introduction

For some time the Rutland Historical Society has been aware of the existence of Martin Freeman, a native son who became president of Liberia College in Africa. What was not known was the extent of the influence Freeman had among America's select circle of educated blacks who were agitating for equal rights more than a century before the turbulent 1960s.

As a graduate of Middlebury College, Freeman could have chosen the quietly rewarding life of a clergyman or president of an American college. He instead opted to dedicate his life to educating young blacks in the newly-established volatile Republic of Liberia. He believed that only in Africa could young free blacks achieve a future of dignity and prosperity.

He underwent trials of Biblical proportions and never realized the fulfillment of his African dream. Still, the precedents established by Freeman and other early black American leaders set the stage for a later generation of activists who finally claimed and won their Constitutional rights in this century.

## About the Author

Freeman's riveting and singular story has been painstakingly researched by Dr. Russell W. Irvine of Georgia State University. It will appear as a part of his forthcoming book, *The History of Black Higher and Professional Education: 1774–1865*.

Dr. Irvine is Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at Georgia State University in Atlanta. He received his Ph.D. from Case Western Reserve University in 1974.

He has written numerous professional articles and book reviews and is a frequent contributor to books and publications. He is also a sought-after lecturer and panelist. As a nationally recognized authority on Afro-American history and current educational policy, he is often called on to conduct discussions and workshops. He also serves as advisor and consultant to professional and civic organizations.

Upon recognizing the Rutland Historical Society's interest in Martin Freeman, Dr. Irvine generously offered portions of his manuscript to be published as a Quarterly. The Society is deeply indebted to Dr. Irvine for sharing his delineation of a heretofore little known or recognized Rutland son.



# **Martin H. Freeman of Rutland America's First Black College Professor and Pioneering Black Social Activist**

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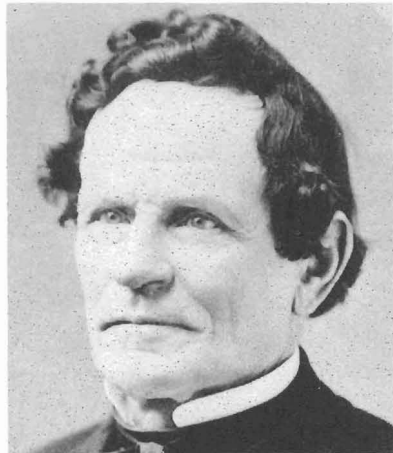
Martin Henry Freeman was born in Rutland, Vermont, on 11 September 1826, to Charles and Patience Freeman. Records on the Freeman family extend back to the American Revolution. His grandfather, Pearson Freeman, served in the American Revolution and through this service won his freedom from slavery. Martin Freeman was reared in the family home built by his grandfather on North Main Street [See map on p. 97]. At the age of eleven, Freeman joined the predominantly white East Parish Congregational Church of Rutland, whose pastor was the Rev. William Mitchell. Mitchell recognized young Martin's precocious nature and when Freeman was a teenager, offered to tutor him in the hope that the young bright Martin might enter college. Mitchell privately instructed him until he reached the age of eighteen. In 1845 Mitchell's letter certifying Freeman's competence in the subjects prerequisite to college entrance, and his strong letter of recommendation, helped Freeman to gain admission to Middlebury College at age nineteen.

Freeman managed to secure the gift of several books and a small personal loan from Benjamin Labaree, president of the college and an anti-slavery supporter. The money borrowed from Labaree was paid back shortly after Freeman's graduation. However, there were other outstanding college loans that Freeman did not repay for a considerable time after graduation.



GRACE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

*The Rev. William Mitchell, pastor of the East Parish Congregational Church 1833-1846.*



MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

*Benjamin Labaree, president of Middlebury College at the time of Freeman's attendance.*

When Freeman attended college, he was indeed among only a handful of young blacks given such an opportunity before the Civil War. As a result of his outstanding academic performance over his four-year stay at Middlebury College, Freeman was selected as class salutatorian. Because of this honor and the unanimous vote of his fellow students, faculty, and the president, he was selected to deliver an address at the commencement. Freeman's address was delivered in Latin to an enthusiastic and approving audience. Sadly, the exact topic Freeman spoke on is lost to history.

It is not certain what Freeman intended to do with his freshly-minted degree or how he occupied his time during the six months following his graduation from Middlebury. However, by April of 1850, at the age of twenty-four, he was extended a rare invitation to join the faculty of the newly-established black collegiate institution, Allegheny Institute. Without hesitation and with much gratitude, Free-



THE CARNEGIE LIBRARY OF PITTSBURGH

*Old Avery College building (circa 1920s)*

man accepted the appointment and joined Philotas Dean as one of the school's first two faculty members. Dean was Allegheny Institute's first president and its senior professor, and Freeman was its first junior professor. The Institute was located a short distance from the city of Pittsburgh in what was then known as Allegheny City, Pennsylvania. In recognition of this academic appointment and his work in the field of mathematics and science, his alma mater conferred upon him a master of arts degree in 1852.

Lincoln and Wilberforce Universities have been generally regarded as the first two black institutions of higher education in the United States. But six years before Lincoln and seven years before Wilberforce, the State of Pennsylvania incorporated the Allegheny Institute and Mission Church on 20 March 1849 in these words:

... that there be and hereby is established and erected in the county of Allegheny, in this commonwealth, a college for the education of colored Americans, in the various branches of science, literature, and ancient and modern languages....<sup>1</sup>

The state-chartered Allegheny Institute and Mission Church was granted the power to confer degrees and was given the customary powers and privileges granted to other colleges in America. Its Board of Trustees was required by a provision of incorporation to consist of a majority of black citizens. From the outset, with one exception, its faculty and student body were all black.

The appointment of Martin Henry Freeman as a professor at Allegheny Institute, later known as Avery College, in April of 1850 gave him the distinction of being the first black professor at any collegiate institution in the United States.

Upon reaching Pittsburgh, with degree and letter of employment in hand, Freeman encountered the largest concentration of blacks he had ever seen. On the streets of Pittsburgh he found a sea of black faces engaged in a wide variety of activities, predominantly in the menial ranks but a few engaged in respectable professional work. In stark contrast to the staid life of his New England upbringing, in Pittsburgh he entered the symbolic, if not the actual, center of black thought and activism which was swirling during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Community life among Pittsburgh's free blacks was internally highly structured, well organized, and, more importantly, perpetually activist oriented. It was similar to black life in other northern cities such as New York, Buffalo, Boston and Philadelphia. Some of the Pittsburgh black community members were involved early on in the struggle to protest for and to protect the welfare of free blacks, both on the local and national levels. Pittsburgh's free blacks were active and eager participants in the first National Negro Convention held in Philadelphia in 1830. An outgrowth of this first convention was the recognition of the need for the higher education of black youth. In the following year, in 1831, members of Pittsburgh's free black community took the lead in an initiative to found a black college in New Haven, Connecticut. However, this effort failed. Particularly in the forefront of both the 1830 convention and the convention of 1831 were Lewis Woodson, John Peck, and John B. Vashon. Frustrated by their early attempt to found an institution of higher learning, these three men were instrumental in prevailing upon the wealthy white Charles Avery to found the Allegheny Institute and Mission



*Charles Avery, founder of Avery College*

Church. In the establishment of this collegiate institution their dream of a college for black youth, though delayed for eighteen years, had finally been realized and the founders were quite anxious for its success.

Since the Allegheny Institute did not officially open until September of 1850, Freeman spent the spring and summer months preparing for its opening. He spent these months drafting course outlines, ordering textbooks and designing curriculum for the year. In addition to his work in the Institute, his first year was spent meeting many of the older stalwarts of Pittsburgh's community, black and white. Of immediate concern to him, however, was the imperative of meeting and becoming acquainted with his new employers, the trustees who had bestowed on him their trust for the success of the college. It was to these men that he wanted to demonstrate that their judgment was neither in error nor misplaced by his appointment.

The charter of the Allegheny Institute and Mission Church expressly provided that at least one-third of its trustees be white citizens, professors of Christianity of the commonwealth, and that the balance be black professors of Christianity of the same commonwealth. The first trustees of the college and the people Freeman first came to know were Charles Avery, the college's chief benefactor, Joseph P. Gazzam, M.D., William M. Shinn, Samuel Johnson, John Peck, Morrison M. Clark, David Stevens, Spencer Watts, and Edward R. Parker.<sup>2</sup> His relationship with President Dean, of course, was more extensive than his relationship with any others affiliated with the school.

Freeman was impressed with the solemnity and serious mindedness of the trustees and worked assiduously to cultivate their confidence, which he enjoyed throughout his tenure in the college. His respect for them was genuine, not only because they were responsible for his employment but because many had demonstrated through long and distinguished careers a dedication to the elevation of the black race in general and the education of black youth in Pittsburgh in particular, a commitment in which he heartily shared. However, it was not this portion of Pittsburgh's elite leadership that Freeman felt free to move among or with whom he routinely socialized. His arrival, by happenstance, coincided with the ascent of a new generation of free blacks. They were better educated than their parents, many college educated or professionally trained. They confronted new and potentially dangerous issues, challenges unlike those faced by their elders. Because of this, their world views and perspectives were bolder and more daring. Freeman, in the turbulent 1850s, joined a generation of young free blacks who confronted deeper and more urgent challenges that threatened not only to reduce their personal rights and liberties but, some thought, would re-enslave all blacks. Freeman was acutely disturbed by the likelihood of their occurrence and was personally consumed by the very thought of it.

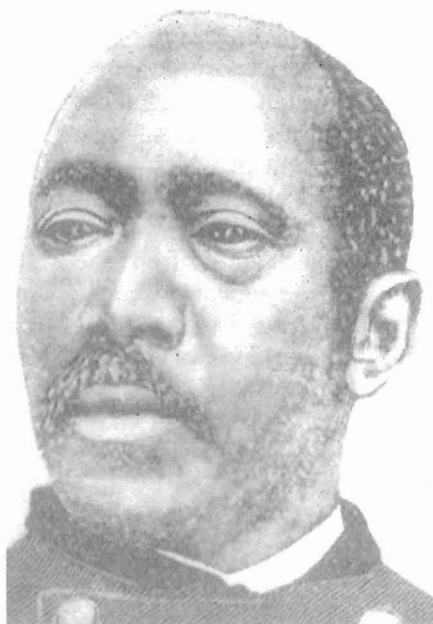
The older black abolitionists during the 1820s and 1830s had been moderately successful in their crusade in opening higher educational opportunities for black youth. Their campaign for education yielded direct benefits for a select number of black youth throughout America by the 1830s and 1840s. In coalition with white abolitionists in 1835 black youth won admission to the Oberlin Collegiate Institute in Ohio. Many of the black youth of Pittsburgh were the first to take full advantage of these higher educational opportunities. John B. Vashon's son, George B. Vashon, was Oberlin's first black collegiate graduate. John Peck's son, David Jones Peck, attended Oberlin College for three years before entering a medical school, becoming the first black medical school graduate in America. David Jones Peck graduated from the Rush Medical College in 1847. John Peck's daughter, Louisa, was a literary degree graduate of Oberlin College. Lewis Woodson's two daughters, Sarah and Hannah, were among the first black females to attend Oberlin College. This generation of Pittsburgh blacks appealed to Freeman on a number of levels. They, like he, represented a new breed of free blacks—college educated and many professional school trained.

In the course of time, there were several native-born Pittsburgh blacks who would have a profound and lasting impact on Freeman. The person who had the greatest direct impact on shaping the philosophy of the young Martin Freeman was the older Martin R. Delany. However, Delany, at the time Freeman arrived in Pittsburgh, was away studying medicine at Harvard College. Also absent was George Boyer Vashon, another native of Pittsburgh who had an impact on his life. Vashon for a brief time emigrated to Haiti but returned to Pittsburgh in November of 1850. Another native of Pittsburgh and later friend and relative of Freeman was Dr. David J. Peck. Peck from 1848 to 1851 was practicing medicine in Philadelphia and first met Freeman some time in 1852. It is difficult to say whether it was his association with these men or the acutely felt press of national issues that confronted free blacks in the crisis years of the 1850s that quickened and animated Freeman's thinking about race in America and his future in it.



PAUL THORNELL

*George Boyer Vashon, Oberlin College's first black graduate in 1844. He was a lawyer and president of Avery College.*



IRVINE

*Martin R. Delany, M.D., a leading black activist and Freeman's life-long friend and mentor.*

The decade of the 1850s opened inauspiciously for free blacks. Three events helped define the fate free blacks endured during this decade: The Fugitive Slave Law (1850); the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854); and the infamous Dred Scott Decision (1857). Freeman along with other free blacks, witnessed the political power of the South increase as northern politicians conceded to southern demands in a series of new laws and judicial decrees. The passage of the first, the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, signaled to some that slavery was even more firmly rooted than at any time before despite the efforts of abolitionists to eradicate it. Sensing the further encroachment on the rights of free blacks, a small determined group of free blacks felt the time was ripe for bold and decisive action. An advertisement was placed in two black newspapers in July 1853, which ran continuously to July of 1854. Martin R. Delany and William Howard Day authorized this advertisement that appeared in *The Alienated American* and *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. The purpose of this year-long ad was to announce a call for a National Emigration Convention to be held on 24, 25, and 26 August 1854.<sup>3</sup>

The Niger Valley Exploring Party was the organization formed as a result of the Emigration Convention of August 1854. From the moment Freeman settled in Pittsburgh he immediately came under the influence of the mounting emigrationist movement among free blacks. Within less than four months of his arrival in Pittsburgh the Fugitive Slave Act was passed. In fact, emigration ideology from the beginning was dominated by black activists from the city of Pittsburgh. Within



three years, Freeman increasingly was influenced by Pittsburgh's young free blacks such as George B. Vashon and David Jones Peck, both staunch advocates of black emigration. However, as noted above, Freeman was most influenced by the writings, personal philosophy, and force of personality of Martin R. Delany. Freeman read and was moved by the power and cogency of Delany's *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*. For the first time, Freeman more clearly came to understand the ubiquity and depth of American racism. Within this volume, Delany insisted that blacks could achieve neither freedom nor equality in America no matter how hard they struggled; thus emigration was the only viable alternative.<sup>4</sup> Delany's words resonated with Freeman since, on the streets of Pittsburgh, he had personally experienced physical assaults and other racial insults. His occupational and educational status was no buffer from such harsh treatment.

The Central Commissioners of The Niger Valley Exploring Party were all men of Pittsburgh. Martin Delany was named president of the National Board of Commissioners. William Webb was Vice-President; Thomas A. Brown, Treasurer; Edward R. Parker, Auditor; Charles W. Nighten, Secretary; and Martin H. Freeman was appointed Special Foreign Secretary of the Niger Valley Exploring Party.<sup>5</sup>

Freeman attended the Emigration Convention in Cleveland. Though he had read an advanced copy of the speech Delany gave at the convention, he sat enraptured by it. He was both impressed and moved by Delany's command of language, global grasp, and analysis of the complexity and scope of the problems confronting blacks in America. Delany's address was titled, "Political Destiny of the Colored Race on the American Continent," and was published and distributed after the convention. Freeman thoroughly and carefully digested this document. It gave him the vocabulary and the language he needed to expand his field of influence in the defense of the rights of blacks. Emboldened by the Cleveland convention, Freeman, upon his return to Pittsburgh the next month, happened upon, or perhaps actively sought, an opportunity to throw himself more fully into the struggle. He found the opportunity in an issue of *Frederick Douglass' Paper* dated 8 September 1854. The paper contained a reprint of an article published in *The National Era* on 31 August under the caption, "What Becomes of the Free Colored People?" Strenuously objecting to the author of the article, Freeman felt compelled to write Frederick Douglass. The essence of the article written by its author, "G", was that the strength of the prejudice against color was so pervasive in America that blacks themselves actively partook in prejudice by eschewing marriages to partners darker than themselves. What apparently bothered Freeman the most was the comment by "G" that "except among such as possess rigid ideas of virtue, the females prefer illicit intercourse with white men, to matrimony with men one shade darker than themselves." "G" concluded his article by suggesting that if cross racial relations persist at the current rate, i.e., the preferences that black females have for white males and the preferences southern white males have for black females that he observed occurring in the South, that blacks as a group would be totally absorbed into the white population.<sup>6</sup>

Freeman's response to this article represented his first known public statement that reached a national audience. Freeman's letter to Frederick Douglass was

in classic Delanyian style. Freeman, perhaps unconsciously, even used much of the same words and phrasing he had heard Delany speak the month before. Freeman commenced by saying:

Your paper of Sept. 8th contained an article taken from the National Era, headed what becomes of the free colored people? and signed G, to which I wish briefly to call attention. It is not the truth of the article that I hope to impeach. Alas! no; G has stated many lamentable facts, and shown that he knows but too well the deep places of our degradation. But while we admit, with shame and sorrow, the truth of many of his statements, we feel disposed to dispute the inference which he deduces from these facts, viz.; that the redemption of the Africo-American from slavery and degradation, can only be brought about by the wholesale prostitution of our wives and daughters. We repel the thought that the negroes way upward to the heaven of respectability and equality lies through the slough of indiscriminate concubinage, and the wicked gate of illicit intercourse. It is evident that G of the Era, and De Tocqueville whom he quotes, have been chiefly conversant with the colored population of the slave States, where their estimate of the virtue of colored females may not be far from correct. But at the same time, let it be remembered that it is more than hinted that chastity even among the women of the superior class in the South, is by no means a drug in market. I am not a Southerner, nor have I ever been in a slave State, hence I cannot speak on this subject from experience or observation. But if rumor with her hundred tongues be not ten thousand times a perjured dame, male house servants at the South, are not unfrequently required by their Mistresses to serve them in the performance of certain duties, that cannot properly be classed under the head of servile labor. Nor is it difficult (so saith rumor) to find Southern women of the superior class, who, like Potiphars wife of old, do not disdain to caste an eye of favor upon colored, but consenting Josephs. The assertion of G that every one of the African descent values himself in proportion to the degree of white blood in his veins is too near the truth to admit of cavil, yet there are many exceptions to this general rule, to be found among colored men of every hue. But there are many of us who have yet to learn that slavery leaves its impress on the soul, not in the color of the skin,—that the lineaments of degradation are found in the thoughts of the heart—not in the texture of the hair. There are many called who differ very little, or not all from the whites in external appearance, but whose mental characteristics are widely different. To illustrate, the white man believes his race to be the race par excellence; the colored man believes his race naturally inferior. The white trusts in the energy of his own stern will and in the strength of his own strong arm: the not all white trusts in the protection of his all white brother and bows his own will to his dictation. With the one, life is a race, which he must strive to win; with the other, life is an experiment, which he would like to try if the Lord is willing, and the white man will help him a little. Ah! sir, the colored man is sadly mistaken if he thinks to become just like a white man by merely acquiring, honorably or dishonorably, sharp features and straight hair. Let the man of whatever hue, respect himself, and be true to the instincts of his manhood; then and not till then, will he be the co-equal, and compeer of the haughty Anglo-Saxon.

In the Convention of 1854, Delany urged blacks, even those not contemplating emigration, to invest in land in the Canadian Provinces. He noted that whites in years past had speculated in the West and realized huge profits when land values increased with westward expansion. Additionally, he suggested doing so because it would be relatively easy, profitable, and a safe investment. Delany followed his own advice two years later. When Delany emigrated to Canada in 1856 to practice medicine in Chatham, Canada, Freeman asked him to be on the lookout for a plot of land that he might purchase. In the same year, Freeman, upon the death of Philotas Dean, Avery College's first president, was appointed its second president. He discovered that the administrative duties of his new office were unpleasant and the longer he stayed in office the more increasingly intolerable he found it.

In the next year, 1857, two events further altered Freeman's general outlook on life and gave greater urgency to his thinking on a number of issues, personally and politically. On 11 September 1857, he married Louisa Eleanor Peck, the sister of Dr. David Jones Peck and the daughter of John Peck, a member of the Board of Trustees of Avery College. The other event, the infamous Dred Scott Decision, handed down the same month of his marriage, jolted Freeman and his contemporaries throughout America. It seemed to Freeman that another prophecy of Delany made in the 1854 Convention was about to come true. He viewed with alarm that the Dred Scott Decision was preliminary to the enslavement of all free blacks. Delany had predicted this three years earlier. Delany in 1854 warned, "we dare predict, and take this favorable opportunity to forewarn you, fellow countrymen, that the time is not far distant, when there will be carried on by the white men of this nation an extensive commerce in the persons of what now compose the free colored people of the North."<sup>7</sup>

The cruel irony of the situation hardly escaped Freeman. His grandfather, Pearson Freeman, was a slave but gained his freedom by service in the American Revolution. This war was for the independence of America as a nation and now this country seemed poised to enslave him.

During the later part of 1857, just before the birth of his first child, Freeman sent Delany four hundred dollars in gold to purchase a fifty-acre plot of land for his family. Freeman saw his investment in Canada as less of a land speculation proposition than as provision for the place where he and his family would be forced to go if events, as Delany predicted, came true. The first child born to Louisa and Martin Freeman, Sarah, died in the first months of her life. Delany, upon learning of the death of his friend's child, wrote Freeman expressing his sympathy. In a return letter, Freeman wrote to Delany in April of 1858, thanking him for his letter of condolence. In this letter, Freeman revealed the maturation of his thinking as to what course of action he anticipated taking. He confided to Delany:

I am more and more convinced that Africa is the country to which all colored men who wish to attain the full stature of manhood, and bring up their children to be men and not creeping things, should turn their steps; and I feel more and more everyday, that I made a great mistake in not going there, when I was untrammelled by family ties, and had the opportunity.<sup>8</sup>

In April of 1859, Freeman published an article in the *Anglo-African Magazine* under the title "The Educational Wants of the Free Colored People." In this article, Freeman first specified the parameter in which a proper definition of education falls. Education for Freeman was "the harmonious development of the physical, mental, and moral powers of man." However, as a condition of this development, man has to have freedom of mind and body. The education of blacks in America, he contended, was retarded by the larger forces of racial oppression under which they lived. He astutely argued that children of parents who hold wealth, civil and political power learn to respect wealth, office, and influence and, hence, learn to respect themselves as children of such parents of power, wealth, and esteem. Their collective sense of self was tied to the achievement of their parents who they, in turn, would replace in such status positions. By extension, all whites, regardless of class, felt a measure of self-respect and investment in this country's collective achievement to the credit of the race they identify as theirs.

In contrast to this, Freeman continued, the black child hears his father nicknamed "Dick", "Jake" or "Ole uncle" or perhaps "Cuffy" or "Ole nigger." They hear their mothers referred to as "Moll", "Dinah", "Suke" or "Black Bets". Hence, from early childhood, the circumstances that surround their parents, and the treatment they receive from the community tends to diminish the respect and reverence they might otherwise have for them. As the black child grows to adulthood and observes that those who hold wealth, power, and honor are white; this circumstance further exacerbates an already waning self-respect. However, Freeman saw as a more deplorable circumstance that the black child was taught directly and indirectly that he or she was pretty in proportion to the extent their features approached Anglo-Saxon standards.

Freeman is biting in his condemnation of blacks in this respect.

Hence flat noses must be pinched up. Kinky hair must be subjected to a straightening process—oiled, and pulled, twisted up, tied down, sleeked over and pressed under, or cut off so short that it can't curl, sometimes the natural hair is shaved off, and its place supplied by a straight wig, thus presenting the ludicrous anomaly of Indian hair over negro features.<sup>9</sup>

Our peculiar circumstance, he continued, thus resulted from the generally low regard that the larger community holds for blacks and the lack of respect blacks have for each other. He queried, "How shall blacks develop in the rising generation the needed self-respect which they so clearly lack?" Anticipating a later Washingtonian educational philosophy, Freeman insisted that self-respect will not come from the current arrangement whereby blacks are concentrated and seek economic opportunity in the highly populated northern urban centers. Blacks, Freeman stated, must turn their attention to the country and agricultural pursuits.

Go then young man, to the rural districts of this country, or to Canada if you wish, or if you dread the manual labor of the farm and fear to face the waving grass, and growing corn ... select some little country town and there wield the implements of your craft, be honest, be industrious and economical and you will secure a position in [the] community for which you might strive in vain in the crowded city.<sup>10</sup>

Freeman concluded with the soaring rhetoric that the great want of the free blacks was not science but self appreciation, not higher mathematics but higher manhood. Freeman stated that knowing his intrinsic worthiness allows an individual to forever be true to himself and loyal to the race. If blacks were true to these principles and precepts "then will the race arise self-emancipated, self-elevated, and self-redeemed."<sup>11</sup>

This 3,500 word essay is the single most extensive body of writing by Freeman yet discovered. Its language, vocabulary, and strident tone resonate as language embraced by contemporary advocates of a form of Afrocentrism. Indeed, many of these advocates are both aware of and trace their intellectual lineage to Delany, Edward Blyden, and Alexander Crummell, all associates of Freeman, but few if any, know of the contribution of Martin H. Freeman to this heritage.

It is not clear how Freeman's public utterances were greeted within the college community. It is likely that Freeman's strong militant pro-black stance and his uncompromising criticism of whites, in general, were not fully welcomed by the conservative trustees of Avery College, black or white. He had one definite supporter on the board: member Edward R. Parker who shared many of the views embraced by Freeman. In fact, Parker, like Freeman, served on the National Board of Commissioners of the Niger Valley Exploring Party. At any rate, by the late 1850s, the popularity of emigration grew steadily, notwithstanding opposition to it among mainstream free black leaders. For personal, if not philosophical reasons, John Peck, Freeman's father-in-law, opposed it. He did not want his daughter Louisa and her children reared outside of Pittsburgh, to say nothing of being taken outside of America. Frederick Douglass, at the national level, was one of the prominent opponents of black emigration. It would not be unreasonable to note the likelihood that other older blacks such as John B. Vashon, John Newton Templeton, and Lewis Woodson also opposed emigration. It was, on the other hand, clear that there was a core of equally distinguished men who were committed to these initiatives. They included Dr. David Peck, the Rev. Theodore Holly, Martin Delany, Robert Campbell, Elymas Rogers, Henry Highland Garnet, Henry Wilson, and, later, Martin Freeman. These men embraced emigration as an abstract principle, and for some it became a necessity. This was urgently the case for Freeman.

Nothing is known of Freeman's life or his activities from 1859 to 1862 other than the fact that by 1860 another child, Cora Blandford, had been born to him and Louisa. Freeman was well respected in Pittsburgh and it was doubtful any serious thought had been entertained about removing him from the presidency of Avery College. This factor, therefore, did not appear central in his thinking about emigration. However, other reasons perhaps account for Freeman's determination to leave America, though by 1862 he was unsure of where he would go.

Whatever the early life experiences with race he encountered in Rutland, Vermont, Freeman was totally unprepared to deal with the onslaught of unremitting slights and assaults that resulted from the categorical treatment he encountered because of race in Pittsburgh. He felt always the odious weight of race and was deeply troubled by each new encounter. He had not grown up in such a racially charged environment, as had his new friends, Delany, and his younger contemporaries Vashon and Peck. To Freeman race was ubiquitous, never yielding to indi-

vidual accomplishment, merit, or achievement. He had enjoyed, as a child, the laurels that came from individual accomplishment as his college career had taught him. Life in America forced upon Freeman compromises of his individuality and sense of manhood at once intolerable, yet inescapable. Freeman's frequent use of the terms "self-respect," "self-esteem," and "self-reliance" were no mere rhetorical musings; they defined him as a person. The manifest realization of these principles was, for Freeman, more important than either occupational position or social status.

The second, and perhaps more overriding factor as to why he sought to escape from America, was tied to his new family obligations, particularly the imperative he felt to fully protect his children from all forms of harm or hurt. This he could not do in a racially oppressive society, as was America in the mid-19th century. Shortly before actually leaving America, Freeman's concerns about rearing his children in America were revealed in a letter he wrote to Joseph Tracy, secretary of the Massachusetts Colonization Society.

I am ready to start at the first opportunity, and we are anxious to leave this country. I trust that our detention was ordered by Infinite Wisdom and will turn for the best but on some accounts I regret that we did not get off last winter. My little girl is imbibing ideas in regard to color, race, &c which I did hope she would never learn.<sup>12</sup>

Sometime in 1861, for reasons perhaps tied to the uncertainty of the outcome of the Civil War, Freeman wrote Martin Delany seeking his advice and thinking about emigration to Haiti. Though he expressed to Delany, three years earlier, his desire to emigrate to Africa, apparently opposition from his wife, or more likely from her family, made him consider this Caribbean island. Delany, to Freeman's distress, did not immediately respond to him. This prompted Freeman to write Delany a second letter, and as before, implored him about the subject of his moving to Haiti. Delany's reply to Freeman was sent as a private correspondence, but because of its general importance, his letter was published as an article in the *Weekly Anglo-African*, 1 February 1862. Delany stated that he did not object to Haitian emigration on the principle that those seeking to go there were motivated because they wished to choose their own rulers, were seeking self-government, and were interested in sustaining a black nationality. However, he cautioned Freeman about the fact that Haiti could never be an international power, as some black leaders were optimistically predicting. The elements necessary for this country to be a world power were simply not present nor could ever be developed. Haiti, he went on to say, had notable shortcomings, principally its territorial size as well as its population size. If its population could be increased such an increase would, of necessity, decrease the resource divisions among a greater number of people. This was Delany's first objection to Haitian emigration.

His substantive concern was with international policy of the ruling countries of Europe who, he felt, were decidedly opposed to an independent and self-governing black nation. To support this argument, he pointed to the recent seizure by Spain of two-thirds of the land of Haiti. He further reminded Freeman that Spain was the first country in modern time to traffic in African slaves. While Delany himself favored emigration of blacks in the Western Hemisphere, namely to the

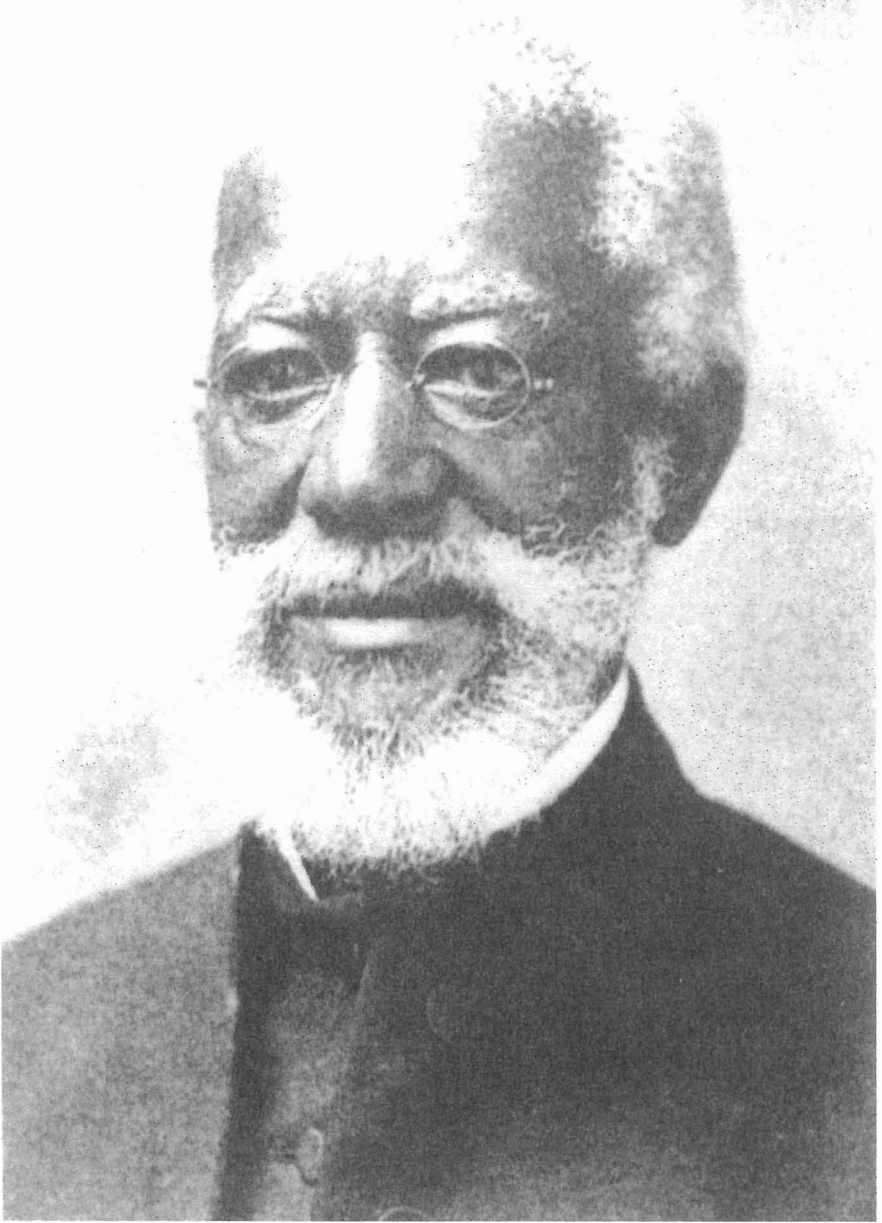
West Indies, Canada, Central and South America, his opinion changed in favor of blacks emigrating to Africa. However, Delany wished to maintain his opposition to the emigration scheme fostered by whites advocating African colonization. His change in thought was reflected in what he revealed to Freeman later on in the letter. Delany maintained that Africa could not be subject to European domination, though they might try. The vastness of the continent, peopled by one great enduring, reproducing, and absorbing mass will endure throughout time.<sup>13</sup>

Shortly after Freeman received Delany's letter, he was more convinced than ever as to what course of action he had to pursue. Again, his friend and confidant, Delany, was instrumental in paving the way for his emigration to Liberia. During the latter part of the 1850s, black nationalists Martin Delany, Robert Campbell, Robert Douglass, Amos Aray, and James W. Purnell spent nearly two years in Africa. A substantial part of that time was spent in Liberia. The party's visit to Africa was an extension of the early work commenced in the Cleveland Emigration Convention of 1854 that resulted in the organizing of the Niger Valley Exploring Party, of which Freeman was a founding member. While in Liberia, Delany and members of his party met most of the leading men of the country including President Stephen Benson. Delany specifically met with the Rev. Alexander Crummell and Edward Blyden and from them learned of the instructional needs of the recently-opened Liberia College. One position at the college had not been filled, that of a professor of mathematics and natural philosophy. Delany, aware of Freeman's general dissatisfaction with administrative duties at Avery College, his growing disaffection for life in America, and, more generally, with his interest in the elevation of Africa, recommended Martin Freeman as the person qualified and capable of assuming this teaching position in Africa.

In July of 1862, President Benson dispatched two of the three professors of Liberia College, Alexander Crummell and Edward Blyden, on a trip to America and the West Indies to disseminate information about the college hoping to recruit prospective students. Crummell was assigned to work in America and Blyden was sent throughout the West Indies. Crummell visited fifteen cities in seven states, but in addition to disseminating information about the college, he had another objective, the one suggested by Delany. One of the cities in Pennsylvania which he visited was Allegheny City, where he privately consulted with Martin Freeman.<sup>14</sup> Learning that Freeman might be willing to accept a professorship in Liberia College, if offered, Crummell wrote Joseph Tracy, secretary at the Massachusetts Colonization Society, recommending Freeman for the position.

Less than six months after Crummell's visit and less than one year after he received Delany's letter, Freeman resigned from Avery College. His letter of resignation was tendered and accepted by the Board of Trustees in February of 1863. Based upon the letter of recommendation from Alexander Crummell and from Freeman's former college president, Benjamin Labaree, he was formally offered the position of professor of mathematics and science and notified of this in a letter sent him from Joseph Tracy on 8 September 1863. In his acceptance letter sent the next day to Joseph Tracy, Freeman was relieved and much appreciative of the offer. He stated to Tracy that he hoped he would be able to meet their expectations.

However, Freeman and his family were delayed from leaving America for close to a year after being offered the professorship in Liberia. Due to the unavoid-



*Alexander Crummell, professor at Liberia College. He recruited Freeman for professorship at the college.*



able delay in his departure, it was suggested to Freeman that he embark upon a lecture tour throughout the New England states. This suggestion for a lecture tour was to secure money to defray the cost of his passage and that of his family to Liberia. Additionally, it was a means to raise funds for books and equipment for his science and mathematics laboratories.

He started his tour by the third week of September when he first visited Boston. While there, for the first time, he met Joseph Tracy and other members of the Massachusetts Colonization Society. From Boston he went to Portland, Maine, and from there he visited his mother in Rutland, Vermont, where he stayed through the first week of October. By the latter part of October, Freeman had spoken in twelve different towns, primarily in the states of Vermont and New Hampshire. Before returning to Pittsburgh he was extended an invitation to speak in Hartford, Connecticut, but declined because he wished, instead, to visit Philadelphia before returning home to Pittsburgh.<sup>15</sup>

Freeman's acceptance of the professorship in Liberia could not have been more ill-timed. Because of the Civil War, many people who would have otherwise financially contributed to his effort declined because of prior commitments related to the war. One person, when approached to give money to Freeman, animatedly refused stating that he could not "join in the movement to aid so worthy a colored man out of the country, as the colored race will apparently soon need him [and] the like to be their leaders!"<sup>16</sup> Further complicating the situation, which in turn indirectly compounded Freeman's problem, was the fact that the number of American blacks seeking to emigrate to Liberia fell to its lowest point during the war years and, most particularly, between 1863 to 1864. The national Colonization Society attempted to capitalize on Freeman's status within the black community and decision to go to Africa by requiring him to recruit other blacks to go with him. He learned of this stipulation upon his return from his lecture tour. In a letter from officials in the national office in Washington, Freeman learned his trip to Liberia depended upon his raising a "large company" of blacks to emigrate with him.

Freeman was furious at this stipulation and in a letter to Joseph Tracy stated his position in no uncertain terms:

If indeed the sailing of the M.C. Stevens depends upon my raising a 'large company' she will not sail, by consequence I shall not be able to go. I have lost my situation at Avery College—lost my reputation as an honest man among many of my friends in the East who have generously given me money for an outfit supposing that I would go this fall and who [in] spite of all explanation that may be offered will still consider that I am blameworthy—lost the respect of my own people who will not fail to proclaim that they knew that I did not mean to go, and say that my late New England tour was an ingenious device to raise a little extra funds. Now this may be sport of the Managers of the Col. Society, but it is death to a poor emigrant who has given up his all, and risked his reputation in the expectation of going to Liberia, then at the eleventh hour is told that unless he can do certain things, which if I mistake not are not his business to do at anytime, he cannot go<sup>17</sup>

Individuals as well as organizations acutely felt the financial strain resulting from the Civil War. Contributions to the office of the American Colonization Society were extremely low and, as noted, few blacks, hoping after hope for a positive outcome of the war, were seeking to emigrate to Liberia. The truth of the matter was that officials of the Society could not justify sending out a vessel to Liberia that was not completely filled with new emigrants. Recognizing Freeman's worsening personal financial situation, the Board of Trustees of Donations, the formal name of the governing board of Liberia College, offered to start paying Freeman the salary he would be receiving if he were, in fact, teaching in Liberia.

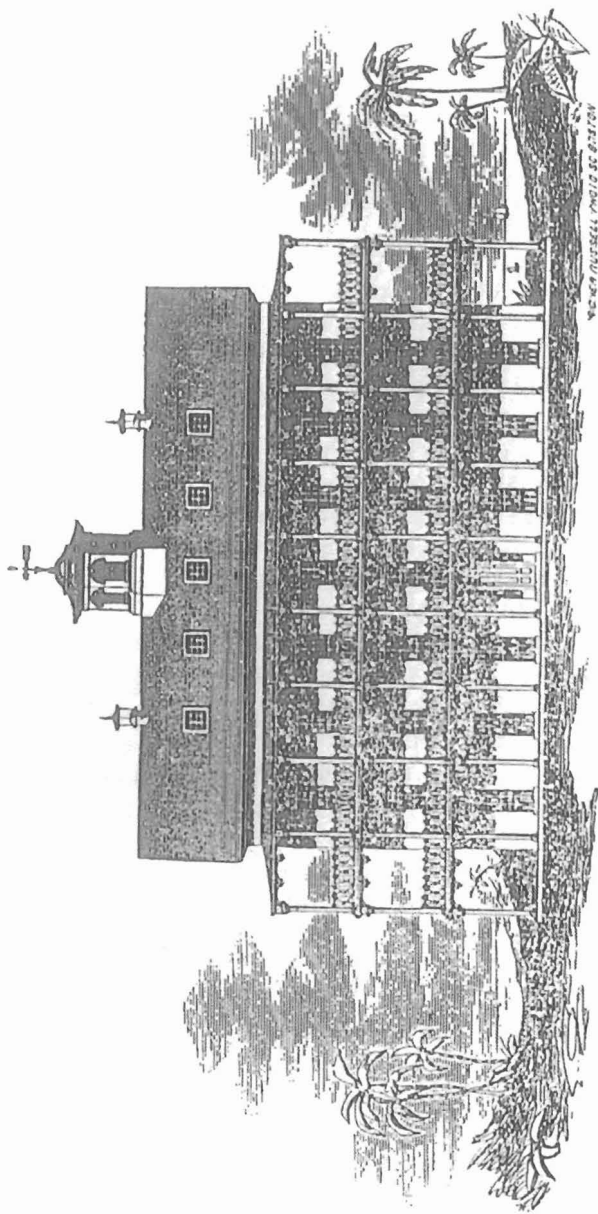
Relieved from the worry of personal funds, Freeman spent the spring and summer months gathering philosophical apparatus, collecting specimens of natural history and other equipment he thought was necessary to adequately equip facilities in the college. In June, he visited Philadelphia for a second time. On this occasion he was there to select textbooks for the courses he would be teaching in the areas of geography and science. In addition to textbooks, he was able to secure globes, an atlas, and maps. The only item he was unable to obtain was an adequately-stocked botanical cabinet.

During the first week of August, he got word from the office of the American Colonization Society of the sailing of the "Thomas Pope." On 19 September 1864, Martin H. Freeman and his family set sail for Africa. The emigrants on the "Thomas Pope," bound for Monrovia, Liberia, were listed as Martin H. Freeman, 37, Louisa E. Freeman, 30, Cora B. Freeman, 4, Edwin Peck Freeman, 2, and Matilda J. Powell, 20. There was no information on nor was the fate known of Matilda J. Powell, the twenty-year-old woman, who accompanied the Freeman family to Liberia.<sup>18</sup>

Upon arriving in Monrovia, Freeman wrote Joseph Tracy expressing his feeling of gratitude to God for all those who assisted in bringing him to the "land of my ancestors." The people he first met on arriving there were the president of Liberia College, Joseph J. Roberts, Professor Edward Blyden, and Alexander Crummell, whom he greeted for a second time. He thought highly of each of them and felt them well prepared in their respective fields of study.<sup>19</sup>

From late 1864 to August 1867, little is known of Freeman's adjustment to life in Liberia, or of his activities at Liberia College. There is a strong suggestion that he, in August 1865, while viewing a solar eclipse with one of his classes, damaged his eyes. Within the next year his eyes failed to improve, which prompted him to return to America for medical attention. In a letter to Joseph Tracy, dated 9 August 1867, Freeman reported that the Executive Committee of the Trustees of Liberia College had granted him a six-month leave to take care of this matter. Ever mindful of his tenuous financial status, Freeman wrote Joseph Tracy to insure that his salary, during this period, would not be discontinued. His request, presumably, was granted by officials in Boston.

After a 47-day voyage across the Atlantic, Freeman arrived in Baltimore, Maryland, on 7 October 1867. His return to Pittsburgh happened to coincide with the resignation of George B. Vashon from the presidency of Avery College. News of the situation at Avery College may have been known to members of the Board of Trustees of Donation in Boston. Freeman wanted to allay any of their concerns that the real reason for his return to America was to reassume work at Avery



LIBERIA COLLEGE AT MONROVIA.

College. On October 17th, he wrote preemptively to Secretary Tracy stating:

I am aware that great efforts will be made to retain me here and reinstate me in my former position. Already have I had offers to the kind, but they will most assuredly fail, nothing but death or blindness will prevent my seeking again my chosen field of labor, the only field that I know of where I can work heartily and hopefully. As for the scattered remnant of the Negro in this country he will never achieve much and what he does will be of no benefit to the Negro. My mission is to the Negro, pure, and simple as he exists in his native land, the best specimens of his race now to be found. And aside from the question of duty to God and my race it is a question of comfort or happiness and self satisfaction in my case. I have never been happy until I made Liberia my home. Not even in my childhood, for my recollection does not recall a time when I was not aware of my true status as a Negro in this country.<sup>20</sup>

Given Freeman's reputation for candor, and sometimes brutal honesty, it was unlikely that he was motivated by any considerations other than the one he had earlier stated to Tracy. However, it might have been equally likely that his wife and her father, John Peck, wanted Freeman to remain in America. His letter to the officials in Boston may have been written not only to allay their concerns but may have also served to reinforce his own thinking on the rightness of the course of action to which he had committed himself. Freeman's suspicions proved correct. There were those who did not want him to return to Africa. He was offered a salary of fifteen hundred dollars a year and a furnished house rent free if he accepted the presidency of Avery College. Freeman stayed in America from October of 1867 to August of 1868. In addition to the pressure exerted upon him by some trustees of Avery College, Freeman was under other pressures to remain in the United States, foremost of which was his wife's pregnancy. Because of this, her family did not want her to return to Liberia until after the baby was born and old enough to travel safely. This child was Clarence Freeman who, like Sarah, died in early childhood.

In the meantime, while still in America Freeman continued to work on behalf of Liberia College. William Tracy of the New York Colonization Society, brother of Joseph Tracy, wrote Freeman a letter of introduction to Professors Chandler and Newberry of the School of Mines at Columbia College. He spent a week at Columbia College gaining knowledge in mineralogy, the testing of gas, and learning more about analytical chemistry. Also, in New York, he received from the New York Colonization Society, \$150 for the purchase of textbooks and chemical apparatus. With this amount, he was able to purchase a compass and some other mathematical instruments for the college. Freeman comforted himself in the knowledge that his longer than expected stay in America would be of a greater value to the college than if he had stayed within the originally stipulated six-month period for the trip.

The optimism that launched Liberia College and Freeman's role in its future began to dim toward the end of 1868. First, Joseph J. Roberts, the first president of Liberia College and first president of the Republic of Liberia, was returned as the president of Liberia in 1868 and Edward Blyden became president of the college. The stability and leadership void left by Roberts' departure from the college was immediately felt by Freeman upon his return in the Fall. Ostensibly, because

of Freeman's longer than authorized stay in America, he found opposition was mounting against him from members of the Executive Committee. His chief opponent was the chairman of the Executive Committee, Samuel Ford McGill, M.D., who questioned financial statements Freeman presented upon his return to the college.

Adding to the problems of the college was the rancorous departure from it of Professor Alexander Crummell. Because of a number of internal problems the college was experiencing, it was unable to retain an adequate number of students, particularly in its Collegiate Department, which threatened the college's closure. While Freeman struggled to hold the institution together, he faced personal problems because of his wife's reluctance to return to Liberia. In December 1868, due to the persistent absence of President Blyden at the college, Freeman was made president pro tem. In this capacity, he was responsible for submitting, among other things, the yearly Reports of the Educational Department of Liberia College, such administrative duties he had long disdained.

His wife would return to Liberia on condition he take out an insurance policy on his life. She feared that if anything were to happen to her husband, Martin, she and her children would be left desolate in Liberia. Freeman agreed to take such a policy, if for no other reason than to assuage his wife's concern, a concern he conceded was well-grounded. The policy was taken with the New England Mutual Life Insurance Company. Louisa Freeman and her three children, Cora, Edwin and new-born Clarence, returned to Liberia in the Fall of 1870 after a three-year absence from Africa.

Blyden's presence at the college was so erratic that Freeman was forced to assume Blyden's course load. Freeman complained in 1871 that beside his own department, which included teaching Arithmetic, Algebra, Geometry, Chemistry, and Natural Philosophy, he was now forced to teach a class in the "Latin Reader" one in "Caesar," one in "Cicero," one in "Virgil," and lessons in the Latin and Greek Grammar. He noted that his day started at 7:00 a.m. and lasted until 2:00 o'clock with an hour break. He said that he often stayed up until 12 midnight poring over the Classics, and recalling forgotten rules, declensions, conjugations, Greek roots, augments, reduplication, prefixes, suffixes, etc. He concluded by saying that this work schedule was too great for him at his age and, moreover, he was forced to work in a country whose climate was hostile to the longevity of life in general.<sup>21</sup>

For nine years, from 1871 to 1880, nothing of the life or activities of Freeman are known. However, in that period a number of people he had known or been associated with died, lessening his circle of friends. The Rev. Joseph Tracy, the person responsible for his employment at Liberia College, died in March of 1875.<sup>22</sup> Tracy was not only the secretary of the Massachusetts Colonization Society but the driving force behind the founding of Liberia College. Freeman, no doubt, more personally felt the loss of President Joseph J. Roberts in 1877. Freeman served under the presidency of Roberts at Liberia College for four years. Upon first meeting Roberts, Freeman remarked that he "surpassed my expectation in gentlemanly courtesy and Christian politeness, which is saying a good deal, for my expectations were very high."<sup>23</sup> Freeman's high esteem and regard for Roberts never diminished. The Roberts family was one of the pioneering black families of

Liberia. Joseph Roberts, along with his two brothers and his mother emigrated from Norfolk, Virginia, to Liberia in 1829, seven years after the nation of Liberia was formed by the American Colonization Society. Joseph J. Roberts was the first black elected president of the Republic of Liberia when it gained its independence in 1847.

The loss of others of his friends and acquaintances lessened this circle even further. The Rev. Henry Highland Garnet who, like Freeman and George B. Vashon, was president of Avery College, died in the early 1880s.<sup>24</sup> Garnet, also like Freeman, was deeply involved in the emigration movement in the pre-Civil War era. Garnet emigrated to Liberia in December 1881, and died the following year. Freeman also lost a close personal friend, Attorney Henry W. Johnson, whom Freeman first met in America, and who emigrated to Liberia the same year Freeman did. Johnson was a member of the Board of Trustees at Liberia College and served as Attorney General of Liberia from 1871 to 1872.<sup>25</sup> However sincere and deep the grief at the loss of his friends and professional colleagues, a profound tragedy soon struck Freeman himself and all but broke his spirit.

The events of Freeman's life from roughly 1880 to 1884 are revealed in a series of letters he wrote Charlotte Chaffee, a friend from his childhood days in Rutland. The first one Freeman wrote in August 1880. His reason for writing this letter was to tell Chaffee of the death of his married daughter, Cora, which occurred nine months earlier in December 1879. Another of the many bitter ironies in Freeman's life was revealed in this letter. Freeman's reason for leaving America was to escape from the virulent racism of America, but sadly he ran head-on into an even more deadly form of prejudice. In this letter, Freeman gives in a powerful and moving way some of the details surrounding the death of Cora. He confides to her what he was reticent to share, even with members of his family remaining in Rutland. He first wanted Chaffee to understand that, notwithstanding all the things that had happened to him in Liberia, and, particularly the death of Cora, he did not regret his decision to go to Africa. During the year Charlotte Chaffee had lost her mother and in the letter Freeman compared the two losses. He comforted her by suggesting that her loss was by visitation of God. "You saw your mother gradually fade away. You knew you would have to grieve, your mother's illness gave you warning." But, Freeman eloquently stated, "my darling died, I know not how. One half of the sting would be removed could I but believe that there was no 'deep damnation in her taking off.' Alas! I cannot." "She was killed," he went on to say, "driven by someone motivated by wrath and malice."<sup>26</sup> Cora had been poisoned to death.

He recalled that another woman who had married into an older wealthy Liberian family had met a similar fate. Knowing this, Freeman was quite concerned for Cora's life and health when he learned she was going to marry one of the more eligible bachelors of Liberia. He said he told his wife and family, as well as the young man, before he married her, that Cora would not live a year. In a real sense, he said, I mourned for Cora from that moment on. Freeman does not give any salient details of exactly how Cora was poisoned. Perhaps relating such details was too painful for him. In any case, nowhere are they revealed. He noted plaintively, "the only joy and light of my life went when Cora died. Now all that remains of life and happiness to me consists in the discharge of duty ... I assure

you that I lost in my daughter the sole comfort and delight of life.” Freeman was able to take a measure of enjoyment in his grandson, Henry Edwin Moore, who had been born to Cora and her husband Edwin Moore. However, this pleasure was short-lived—Henry Edwin Moore did not live to see his first birthday.

In a second letter to Charlotte Chaffee, sent in August 1883, more was revealed about Freeman’s life at 57 years of age. He first expresses his gratitude to Charlotte’s father for sending him newspapers, allowing him to keep up with news and information in America. Freeman also remained in contact with one of his white college classmates, J. J. H. Gregory.<sup>27</sup> Gregory regularly sent Freeman newspapers, as well. In 1910, officials of Middlebury College sent out an inquiry to the alumni. Gregory responded to the inquiry in a letter and tells of an incident involving himself and Freeman during the commencement exercise in 1848, the year before both graduated. Observing that none of Freeman’s classmates would march next to him during the procession, Gregory bolted from the person next to him to take the arm of Freeman in the procession.<sup>28</sup> This act, no doubt, solidified the life-long bond between these two men.

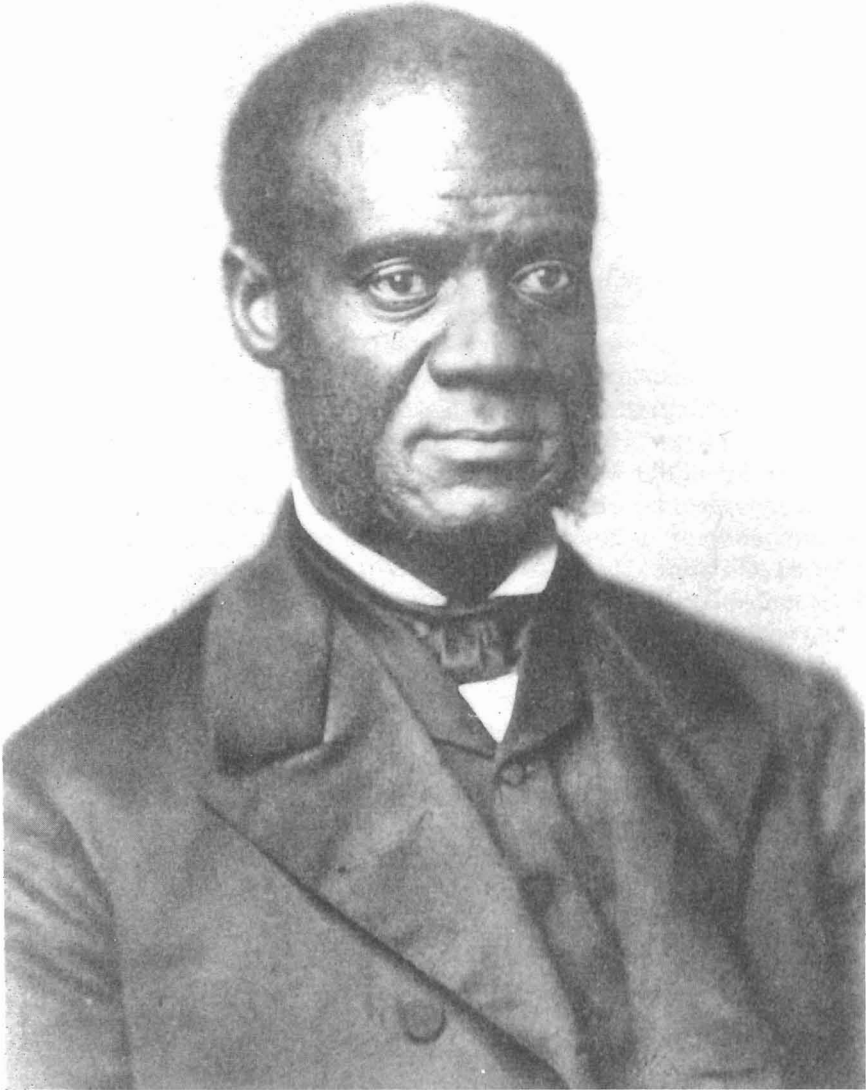
Freeman received a picture of the Brooklyn Bridge from Charlotte about which he remarked that he doubted he would ever see the bridge other than in a photograph. Freeman kept her informed about his family through this correspondence. On 9 September 1872, Louisa had given birth to their fifth child, John Britton, who was eleven years old when Freeman wrote this letter in 1883. Their other son, Edwin Peck, in 1883 was 21 years old and worked as a clerk in the Liberian Treasury Department. Edwin had a strong desire to go to the United States to study medicine. However, Freeman could not afford to send him to medical school. Freeman did want him to go to the United States to teach and save enough money to put himself through medical school. His great fear, however, was that Edwin would resent the racial insults he might receive there and therefore be killed or maimed for life.

Like contemporary Afrocentrists, ever racially conscious, Freeman rarely missed an opportunity to criticize what he viewed as negative assessments of blacks from whatever quarter they emanated. In his last letter to Charlotte Chaffee, in 1884, Freeman bitterly complained about the propensity of western anthropologists to classify narrowly and erroneously Negro physical characteristics or phenotype. Freeman’s response was prompted by observations he had recently made in connection with the gathering of a large number of native tribes at Liberia College. These tribes had been invited, by the government of Liberia, to meet and discuss matters of mutual interest. The only building in Monrovia large enough to accommodate 300 people was the college building.

I did wish some of those Caucasian scientists who write books about the flat noses, thick lips, prognathous jaws, crooked shanks, and long heels of their ideal Negro could have looked on that group of native Africans, stalwart of limb, finely proportioned in every curve and line of their beautiful black forms. Of course I do not wish to make them all Appolos [sic] for there were . . . chiefs and noblemen, tall comely fellows, six feet and over in their sandals, with features of various cast, round faces, long faces, square faces, high foreheads, broad foreheads, narrow foreheads,

flat noses, short noses, long noses, straight noses, hooked noses, Grecian noses, Roman noses, all sorts of noses, that any one knows except the turn-up and pug—not one of such did I see.<sup>29</sup>

Tending to the affairs of Liberia College increasingly consumed most of Freeman's time throughout the mid-1880s. By then he had been employed at the college for twenty-five years. In recognition of his years of service, both the New York and the Massachusetts Colonization Societies sent him a sum of money and special certificate acknowledging their gratitude for his diligent and long service.



*The Rev. Henry Highland Garnet, a leader of the free black community in the 19th century. He also served as president of Avery College and was another in Freeman's close circle of friends.*



Though Edward Blyden had formally been inaugurated president of the college, he spent a great deal of time away from Monrovia, mostly in Sierra Leone, the United States, and England. Blyden's absence meant Freeman was nominally in charge of the college. This meant he was often required to send the reports on the affairs and activities of the college and was responsible for hiring new faculty and making recommendations on salary. In addition, he was responsible for overseeing major renovations and repairs to the college building that were undertaken from the middle to latter part of the 1880s. Although these responsibilities may



DORCAS CHAFFEE

*Charlotte (Thrall) Chaffee, Freeman's childhood friend, faithful correspondent and confidant.*



*J.J.H. Gregory, Freeman's Middlebury College classmate and loyal friend.*



*Reuben Rose Thrall, father of Charlotte Chaffee, civic leader and local agent of the Underground Railroad.*

have fallen unfairly to Freeman, he nevertheless remained a close and supportive friend of Blyden, even supporting him in his bid to become president of Liberia.

Freeman's health began to seriously fail in the middle part of 1886. He wrote George W. Samson, secretary of the New York Colonization Society, stating rhetorically that he had always had an interest in all facets of education in Liberia in general, and for the prosperity of Liberia College in particular. However, he feared that the college's welfare was too closely tied to his personal welfare and health and warned that his labors as an educator might soon come to an end. His health had so deteriorated that he was compelled to apologize for being too incapacitated to issue the college's report for the year 1886. The 1886 report was not sent until January 1887. From June to September 1886, Freeman was unable to do any work at the college but did manage to keep up with some less demanding correspondence from his small farm home, about a ten-minute walk from the campus.

After submitting the 1886 report on the college in January 1887, Freeman returned to America for a second time after a twenty-five year absence. He arrived in New York on the 19th of February, after a 28-day voyage. He was admitted into St. Luke's Hospital and was examined by a physician. Told what he already knew, that he suffered from a bad heart and kidneys, he was advised to seek further medical attention in Pittsburgh where he could also stay in the home of his son, Edwin P., who was by then living in Pittsburgh.<sup>30</sup> He spent three months in Pittsburgh, before returning to New York, where he met members of the Board of Control of the New York Colonization Society, people he had corresponded with, but had never personally met. It was on this occasion that Freeman finally saw the Brooklyn Bridge, a sight he thought he would never see.

In late May, while still in New York, Freeman underwent oral surgery for the removal of seven teeth. As a result of this surgery, he lost an extensive amount of blood, which further impaired his overall health. During his convalescence he received reports or heard rumors concerning activities related to the college. One such report that reached him was that a white person would be sent to Liberia to take over the operation of the college. To which Freeman bluntly and characteristically replied, "In regard to this matter [of a white person being appointed president] permit me to say that I shall be very glad if any man whether white, black, red, yellow or even green is sent out to relieve me and release me from my present position of president pro tem."<sup>31</sup>

He was able, for the last time, to visit his old home state of Vermont in November 1887, a month before he sailed back to Liberia, also for the last time. The New York Colonization Society paid for his return trip. Freeman reached Liberia, after a 44-day voyage, on 18 January 1888. Freeman would write a total of five more letters from February to November 1888. Most of these letters were about administrative issues relevant to the operation of the college, which, from his days at Avery College, he found burdensome. Nevertheless, to the end, he labored for the good of Liberia College and for the elevation of black youth in general. In his last correspondence, he informed J. C. Braman that the Executive Committee had unanimously requested that he be appointed president of the college. But he noted that the urgency in their request had less to do with wanting him, than it did with not wanting Professor A. B. King to have the position. Again, Freeman was subject to another curious irony. What he wanted least at this stage

of his life was bestowed upon him, the burdensome administrative duty of a college president. In 1889, at the January meeting of the Trustees of Donations for Education in Liberia, the election of Martin Henry Freeman as president of Liberia College was confirmed. Given the state of his mental and physical health it appeared unlikely that Freeman ever took any official action as the president of the college.<sup>32</sup>

On 13 March 1889, the following was written in a letter to officials at the Massachusetts Colonization Society in Boston. The letter was from Arthur Barclay, a professor Freeman had hired two years earlier. Barclay wrote, "I regret very much to announce the death of Prof. M. H. Freeman of Liberia College, which took place today." Barclay reported that Freeman's last words to him were, "I can teach no longer."<sup>33</sup> With money from Freeman's life insurance policy, Louisa Freeman buried her husband where he wanted most to live, in the soil of Africa, "the land of his ancestors."

By request of Freeman's eldest son, Edwin P., arrangements were made by the Massachusetts Colonization Society to transport his mother, Louisa, and his sixteen-year-old brother, John Britton, from Monrovia back to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Louisa Peck Freeman, as she boarded a ship in June of 1889, mourned the loss of a son, Clarence, a daughter, Cora, and a husband, Martin, to the continent of Africa.

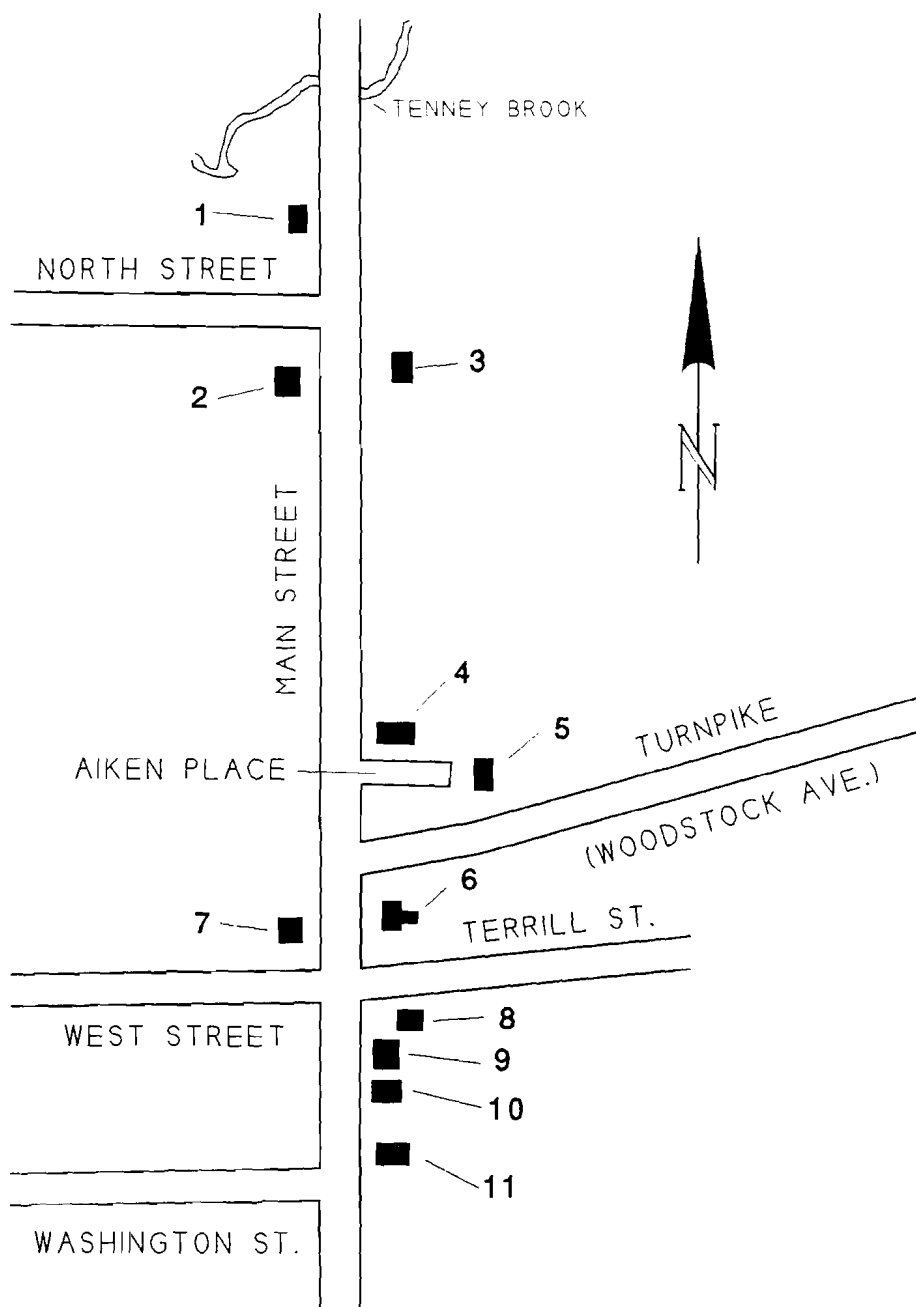
### Epilogue

Efforts by the author to find descendants of the Freeman family have been unsuccessful. Apparently, Edwin's ambition of becoming a physician was not realized. Edwin P. and John B., after the death of their father, worked in the city of Pittsburgh, one as a janitor and the other as a porter.<sup>34</sup> It is not known in what year Mrs. Louisa Eleanor Peck Freeman, the steadfast and devoted wife of Martin Henry Freeman, M.A., died.

### KEY TO MAP

1. Old East Parish Cemetery.
2. Approximate site of Pearson Freeman's potash works.
3. House built by grandfather Pearson Freeman where Martin was raised.
4. East Parish Congregational Church where Martin became a member in 1838.
5. Church parsonage and home of the Rev. William Mitchell, Martin's teacher and benefactor. The Rev. Mitchell had Abolitionist leanings which may have led to his dismissal from the East Parish pulpit in 1846. In 1852 he became agent of the Vermont Colonization Society and later served as agent of the New York and then the New Jersey Colonization Society.
6. The elegant home of Reuben R. Thrall and daughter Charlotte, later Mrs. Frederick Chaffee. Reuben Thrall was a civic leader, postmaster, attorney and local agent for the Underground Railroad. Reuben and Charlotte maintained a lifelong friendship with Freeman.
7. The first Episcopal Church.
8. Reuben R. Thrall's law office.
9. The U.S. Post Office
10. The U.S. and County Courthouse
11. Baptist Church where Vermont Abolitionists met.

## Young Martin Freeman's Rutland



## Bibliographical Essay

The year 1996 marks the 170th anniversary of the birth of Martin H. Freeman, a pioneering yet controversial black educator, social activist, and scholar of the nineteenth century. To date, nothing appears in the pages of American educational history that gives an account of the life of Professor Martin H. Freeman, though by mid-century he was the most renowned black scholar in mathematics and science. Mention of his name appears in only two history volumes. The first note of him was made by Martin R. Delany in *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (1854). The second, seventy years later, was made by Carter G. Woodson in *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861* (1919). However, in both instances, the barest reference is made. In the first, his name is mentioned and reference made to the fact that he was one of the first black college graduates in America. The college from which he graduated, however, was incorrectly named as Rutland College. In the other, it was noted that Freeman was a professor and, later, president at the defunct Avery college of Allegheny City, Pennsylvania. As with the first reference, Woodson repeats the first error, suggesting that Freeman was a graduate of Rutland College.

Within the past five years, new sources have surfaced that reveal a great deal of biographically relevant information on Martin H. Freeman. One such source was *The Black Abolitionists Papers* (The Microfilm Edition), edited by C. Peter Ripley (1992). Contained within this volume are seven entries under the name "M. H. Freeman." The first entry was for the year 1854, the last entry was made in 1862. With the exception of four years, this period corresponds to Freeman's life when he was most politically active, along with Martin Delany, in the black emigration movement of the 1850s. It was also the period covering his affiliation with Avery College, as professor and president. This material gives insight into the fluid national events during the crises decade of the 1850s that personally influenced Freeman to leave America and emigrate to Liberia, Africa.

The second source of biographical material is a group of documents in the archival holdings of the Massachusetts Historical Society under the files of the Massachusetts Colonization Society. From this source, an unexpected discovery was made. More than 85 letters were retrieved from these files. Most of them were written by Martin H. Freeman from 1862 to 1889, the period covering his life in Liberia, Africa, while professor, president pro tem, and, later, president of Liberia College.

These two sources, then, constitute a span of time covering most of the years of Freeman's adult life. The Ripley material consists of letters to or from Freeman, principally correspondence between Freeman and Martin R. Delany, his close personal friend, political ally, and confidant. Additionally, there are two newspaper articles written by Freeman, one published in 1854 and the other in 1859. The Massachusetts Colonization Society material yielded the collection of letters, most of an official nature, between Freeman and officials in the office of this organization. This colonization society in conjunction with the New York Colonization Society founded Liberia College. His relation, particularly with the first organization, was cemented when, in September 1863, Freeman was appointed professor

of mathematics and science at the college founded by these organizations. These documents cover forty-five of the sixty-three years of Freeman's life and provide rich, new insight on the stormy, contentious, and sometimes tragic life Freeman lived both in America and Africa. He attempted to shape the events of America and Liberia during his life as educator, activist, and social commentator and, in some small way, he did.

## BACK NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The Acts of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, No. 194, March 20, 1849, pp. 233.

<sup>2</sup>Incorporating Trustees of the Allegheny Institute and Mission church.

<sup>3</sup>The Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party, 1861, Section I, p. 5

<sup>4</sup>Adeleke, Tunde, "Martin R. Delany's Philosophy of Education: A Neglected Aspect of African American Liberation Thought" *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (1994): p. 229.

<sup>5</sup>Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party, Section I, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup>The National Era, August, 31, 1854.

<sup>7</sup>Black Abolitionist Papers, Reel 8, Frame 0560, pp. 29–30.

<sup>8</sup>Black Abolitionist Papers, Reel 11, Frame 0204.

<sup>9</sup>Black Abolitionist Papers, Reel 11, Frame 0673.

<sup>10</sup>Black Abolitionist Papers, Reel 11, Frame 0673.

<sup>11</sup>Black Abolitionist Papers, Reel 11, Frame 0673.

<sup>12</sup>Massachusetts Colonization Society File, Letter, August 1, 1864.

<sup>13</sup>*Weekly Anglo-African*, February 1, 1862.

<sup>14</sup>*African Repository*, Volume 39, No. 5, 1863, p. 140.

<sup>15</sup>Massachusetts Colonization Society File, Letter, October 8, 1863.

<sup>16</sup>Massachusetts Colonization Society File, Letter, March 20, 1863.

<sup>17</sup>Massachusetts Colonization Society File, Letter, November 7, 1863.

<sup>18</sup>*African Repository*, Volume 40, No. 11, October 1864. The name "John P." is incorrect, Freeman's son was Edwin Peck.

<sup>19</sup>Massachusetts Colonization Society File, Letter, November 31, 1864.

<sup>20</sup>Massachusetts Colonization Society File, Letter, October 17, 1867.

<sup>21</sup>Massachusetts Colonization Society File, Letter, August, 1871 (no day given).

<sup>22</sup>58th Annual Report of the American Colonization Society, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup>Massachusetts Colonization Society File, Letter, Nov. 31, 1864.

<sup>24</sup>Sixty-Sixth Annual Report of the American Colonization Society, 1883, p. 5.

<sup>25</sup>Sixty-Eighth Annual Report of the American Colonization Society, 1885, p. 6. On June 24, 1885 Freeman's life-long friend Martin R. Delany also died.

<sup>26</sup>From the Collections of Vermont Historical Society, Letter to Charlotte Chaffee from Martin H. Freeman, August 2, 1880.

<sup>27</sup>From the Collections of Vermont Historical Society, Letter to Charlotte Chaffee from Martin H. Freeman, August 23, 1883.

<sup>28</sup>Middlebury College Alumni Records, J. J. H. Gregory Folder, 1910.

<sup>29</sup>From the Collections of Vermont Historical Society, Letter from Martin H. Freeman to Charlotte Chaffee, January 6, 1884.

<sup>30</sup>Massachusetts Colonization Society File, Letter, February 25, 1887.

<sup>31</sup>Massachusetts Colonization Society File, Letter, September 10, 1887

<sup>32</sup>Massachusetts Colonization Society File, Letter, February 20, 1888.

<sup>33</sup>Massachusetts Colonization Society File, Letter, March 13, 1889.

<sup>34</sup>City Directory of Pittsburgh, 1900.

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